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Sixty-first year

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Wednesday, 15 March 2006, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Mayoral	(Argentina)
Members:	China	Mr. Li Junhua
	Congo	Mr. Gayama
	Denmark	Ms. Løj
	France	Mr. De La Sablière
	Ghana	Nana Effah-Apenteng
	Greece	Mr. Vassilakis
	Japan	Mr. Oshima
	Peru	Mr. De Rivero
	Qatar	Mr. Al-Nasser
	Russian Federation	Mr. Denisov
	Slovakia	Mr. Burian
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Emyr Jones Parry
	United Republic of Tanzania	Mr. Mahiga
	United States of America	Mr. Bolton

Agenda

The situation concerning Iraq

Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 30 of resolution 1546 (2004) (S/2006/137)

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06-27196 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning Iraq

Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 30 of resolution 1546 (2004) (S/2006/137)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Iraq, in which he requests to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the consideration without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. al-Istrabadi (Iraq) took a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq.

It is so decided.

I invite Mr. Qazi to take a seat at the Council table.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2006/137, which contains the report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 30 of resolution 1546 (2004).

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear briefings by Mr. Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, and by Mr. John Bolton, representative of the United States of America, on behalf of the multinational force.

I now give the floor to Mr. Qazi.

Mr. Qazi: The report of the Secretary-General before the Council details the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) from 8 December 2005 to 7 March 2006. I welcome the opportunity to brief the Council today on the work of UNAMI and its ongoing efforts to assist the people of Iraq in implementing its mandate under resolution 1546 (2004).

As the report notes, despite the notable achievement of all the political transition benchmarks in 2005 that were envisaged in resolution 1546 (2004), Iraq continues to face enormous security, political and reconstruction challenges. Given these grave challenges, Iraq's progress in meeting its transitional benchmarks is all the more remarkable. UNAMI is proud to have been associated with the achievements principally of the people of Iraq, the Transitional National Assembly, the Transitional Government and the political leadership of the country in meeting the timetable. The Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq and the Constitutional Drafting Committee of the Transitional National Assembly deserve particular mention for bringing about these accomplishments.

These achievements should have provided a basis for the next phase of the political process in Iraq, one characterized by a fully sovereign and democratically elected Government. However, the bombing of the Shia shrine in Samarra on 22 February 2006 and its violent aftermath have demonstrated that Iraq's political transition is increasingly threatened by intersectarian violence, exacerbated by the continuing insurgency and counter-insurgency, acts of terror and a deteriorating human rights situation.

While sectarian fissures have always been an integral part of Iraq's political history, today they have come to dominate and almost define Iraqi politics and its future prospects. As the Secretary-General has emphasized in his report, sectarian violence has emerged as a main threat to the security and stability of Iraq. It is fed by growing mistrust between communities despite the fact that, in their daily lives and in their individual attitudes towards each other, most Iraqis emphatically reject and transcend this divide. Overcoming the sectarian divide is, above all, the responsibility of Iraq's political leadership. If that

responsibility is not taken up with the urgent priority it requires, the divide will severely undermine efforts to promote security and strengthen national cohesion. The Secretary-General has therefore emphasized that promoting mutual trust and national reconciliation must remain the top priority, and that the need for sustained intercommunal dialogue and confidence-building measures to promote national reconciliation is all the more urgent now.

The calls by a large spectrum of Iraq's political and religious leaders for restraint and peaceful dialogue and the quick, concrete action taken by the Government of Iraq to bring the situation under control are promising signs that the potential for peaceful political solutions exists. For my part, I have stepped up my engagement with Iraq's political, religious and civic leaders with a view to encouraging greater intercommunal understanding, including through the Political Consultative Committee convened by Prime Minister al-Jaafari, which was formed in response to the Samara attack and its aftermath.

UNAMI is also urging the Government, Iraq's political and religious leaders and civil society to demonstrate that they will not be divided and defeated by the nefarious aims of those seeking to undermine Iraq's political process and instead take measures aimed at promoting the rule of law and human rights. Together with UNESCO and with the support of the United Nations Development Programme, UNAMI has also launched an initiative to assist the Government of Iraq in restoring the Samarra shrine and other religious sites that were damaged during the recent violence. The international response has so far been very encouraging. Taken together, these measures will, hopefully, contribute to the process of building mutual trust and national accord.

Despite some grounds for hope, the overall situation in Iraq remains tense and volatile. Recent developments have made negotiations on government formation more difficult. This has created a dangerous and prolonged political vacuum. To prevent the situation from deteriorating further and to foster an environment in which all Iraqis can discuss the future of their country free of intimidation and fear, all efforts must now be directed at strengthening the momentum of the political process, with a view to developing an agreed national compact that is responsive to the aspirations of all Iraq's communities. Continued support from the Security Council and its members will be essential in this endeavour.

With the expected convening of the Council of Representatives on 16 March — that is, tomorrow — it is now incumbent on all concerned to move swiftly to form a fully inclusive Government, whose credibility and effectiveness will depend on whether it will be able to inspire the confidence and trust of all Iraqis and establish professional, transparent and non-sectarian institutions that will practice good governance based on the rule of law and human rights.

A number of competing proposals about the composition and agenda of the new Government are currently under consideration. Everything must now be done to help the negotiating parties reach a sustainable compromise as quickly as possible. Another important step will be the constitutional review. I hope that the new parliament will use this process to reach a national consensus on a strong framework for the Iraqi State. That is an essential prerequisite for the country's long-term stability. As part of its core political mandate under paragraph 7 (a) of Security Council resolution 1546 (2004), UNAMI stands ready to provide any assistance that might be necessary for the formation of an inclusive Government and is fully engaged with Iraqi leaders to support the constitutional review and the effective implementation of the constitution.

Iraq's stability is intrinsically linked to the stability in the region, and vice versa. UNAMI therefore remains engaged with regional countries and intends to step up efforts in the coming period. Over the past 18 months, my deputies and I visited Syria, Turkey, Iran, Jordan and Kuwait. On 28 March, I intend to meet Arab leaders at the eighteenth Arab Summit in Khartoum to discuss the regional situation as it relates to Iraq. As a concrete step to increase regional engagement, I have proposed the establishment of a regional contact group that would bring together Iraq's regional neighbours to discuss how to improve stability in Iraq. I intend to continue discussions on this proposal in Khartoum. I will also continue to support the initiative of the League of Arab States to hold a conference on Iraqi national accord in Baghdad in June and will continue to support the dialogue started last November in Cairo among political, religious and community leaders across Iraq.

In addition to UNAMI's political activities under paragraph 7 (a) of its mandate — which will remain a

priority in 2006 — UNAMI is also seeking to strengthen its activities in the other key areas of its mandate under paragraph 7 (b) of resolution 1546 (2004) — namely, reconstruction and development, humanitarian assistance and human rights. To this end, UNAMI is developing a phased approach that would integrate all UNAMI activities into its overall political strategy to promote national dialogue and reconciliation. Concrete priorities will be established in close consultation with the new Government and international partners.

The urgency of activities under this part of UNAMI's mandate is demonstrated by the deteriorating human rights situation. While the Government has taken initial steps, more determined measures are necessary, particularly with regard to de facto arbitrary detentions, torture and extrajudicial killings. The Multinational Force and the Iraqi security forces have a particular responsibility in this regard. In the absence of such measures, efforts to strengthen national cohesion, mutual trust and national reconciliation might prove elusive. In fulfilling its mandate, UNAMI will continue to monitor the human rights situation closely and will provide further comments and recommendations in its next bimonthly human rights report, to be released shortly.

It is clear that the current situation in Iraq constitutes a serious obstacle to the effective implementation of infrastructural and income-generating projects designed to address unemployment and the provision of basic services. If not effectively addressed, ongoing violence will prevent donor programmes from having their desired impact. Nevertheless, UNAMI intends to remain actively engaged, through its United Nations country team, to maintain its important role in donor coordination and to support humanitarian, reconstruction and development activities, circumstances permitting. UNAMI is also fully engaged in preparations for the next donor conference of the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq, which is now planned for July.

As the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the designated official for security, I am accountable to the Secretary-General for the safety and security of all United Nations personnel in Iraq. In the current political and security environment in Iraq, United Nations staff members remain at risk of becoming targets of violence. Staff security, therefore, remains the Mission's overarching guiding principle. UNAMI's activities will continue to be demand-driven and focused on added value in areas of comparative advantage. An expanded role for UNAMI need not necessarily translate into an increase of the current size of the Mission. The emphasis will remain on the quality of UNAMI's assistance rather than the size of the Mission, which will be conditioned by a continuous evaluation of the security environment and the availability of security and essential life support systems.

If a more robust role is expected of the United Nations in the next phase of Iraq's political transition, there will be a concomitant need to enhance the necessary capacities within UNAMI. One requirement will be for dedicated air assets to ensure our greater operational mobility and flexibility. Despite many requests to Member States, UNAMI has not been able to secure the required dedicated air assets. That is regrettable, and a solution should be found as a matter of urgency.

With the Multinational Force moving into strategic overwatch and the Iraqi security forces not yet fully formed, trained and tested, safety and security for UNAMI staff and premises will require additional support. I thank the Governments of Fiji, Georgia, Romania and the Republic of Korea for supporting our security arrangements, and I thank the donors for their support. I am also grateful for the efforts of the Multinational Force to facilitate the movements of UNAMI staff. The continued support of the members of this Council will remain essential with regard to both UNAMI's immediate security needs and the wider issue of enhancing the capacities of Iraq's own security services.

In addition, I am grateful for the hospitality, support and facilities provided by the Governments of Jordan and Kuwait to enable UNAMI to continue to discharge its mandate under resolution 1546 (2004). Above all, I am grateful to the Government of Iraq for its continuous cooperation.

It has become apparent that the next six months in Iraq will be critical. The cloud of pessimism that has further darkened as a result of recent developments has to be lifted. While the Government of Iraq and the political leadership must discharge the primary national responsibility that devolves upon them, it is equally incumbent upon the neighbours of Iraq and the

international community to enable them to do so. UNAMI is privileged to share in that responsibility by facilitating the processes of dialogue, compromise and national reconciliation, by providing humanitarian, reconstruction and development assistance and by promoting good governance, human rights and the rule of law, as well as the establishment of democratic institutions.

Setting Iraq on an irreversible path towards a peaceful and democratic future will be a long journey. What is needed first and foremost is the commitment of the new Government of Iraq, the Security Council, regional countries and, most of all, the Iraqi people to turn the page and move forward towards a stable, peaceful and prosperous Iraq. In that endeavour, UNAMI will continue to stand by the Iraqi people.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Special Representative Qazi for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the representative of the United States of America.

Mr. Bolton (United States of America): As mandated by Security Council resolutions 1546 (2004) and 1637 (2005), I am pleased to report to the Council, on behalf of the 29 countries making up the Multinational Force, on the Force's progress towards the fulfilment of its mandate.

During this reporting period, we witnessed and the Security Council condemned some of the most despicable attacks in recent memory. The 22 February attack on the holy shrine of the Imams Ali Al-Hadi and Al-Hassan Al-Askari in Samarra and the ensuing attacks on other religious sites were heinous crimes as well as deliberate attempts to foment sectarian strife in Iraq and the region.

The international community understands the deep anguish caused by those attacks. We join in the calls for calm made by Iraq's religious and political leaders. We honour the memory and courage of all those who have lost their lives in the fight for a federal, democratic, pluralistic and unified Iraq, and we recognize the Iraqi people's success thus far in establishing the foundations of a new political system through free and fair elections, as well as the significant strides that have been made in training and equipping Iraq's security forces.

There have been important developments since our last report. With the successful election on 15 December 2005, the Iraqis have now met all the political benchmarks established by the Transitional Administrative Law and endorsed by the Security Council in resolution 1546 (2004), save only the seating of the new Government. The 15 December election was marked by unprecedented voter turnout, a low level of violence and significant participation by all communities.

The insurgents and terrorists remain capable of and intent on carrying out attacks against Iraqi civilians, officials and security forces, with the goal of destabilizing the legitimately elected Government of Iraq and disrupting the democracy that has begun to take root there. More than 80 per cent of insurgent attacks continue to be concentrated in four of Iraq's 18 provinces: Baghdad, Al Anbar, Salah ad Din and Ninawa. Twelve provinces containing more than 50 per cent of the population experience only 6 per cent of all attacks. Although almost 80 per cent of all attacks are directed against coalition forces, Iraqis suffer 75 per cent of casualties. Insurgents have learned to avoid direct engagement with coalition forces, instead using hit-and-run attacks and attacks from a distance. Improvised explosive devices remain the primary insurgent weapon of choice.

December 2005 saw an increase in insurgent attacks leading up to the 15 December election, which resulted in a greater number of attacks in December than in November. Insurgent attacks decreased from December to January but rose again in February. The chief cause of that was the 22 February destruction of the holy shrine of the Imams Ali Al-Hadi and Al-Hassan Al-Askari, which spawned subsequent attacks on other religious sites and other violence.

Militias and other groups continue to challenge the rule of law at the local and regional levels. Attacks on Iraq's infrastructure continue to have an adverse impact on the availability of electricity and on oil revenues. Infrastructure attacks in December and January were higher than in recent months but still remained below the 2004 averages. Although the number of attacks has continued to decrease, the severity of attacks has increased. The Multinational Force will continue to work with the Iraqi Government and other international partners to improve infrastructure security.

Iraqi security forces continue to grow and improve and to conduct more and more independent

operations each day. They proved their ability to provide security to the Iraqi people during the 15 December elections, as they had done for the October referendum. Multinational forces continue to train, mentor and equip the Iraqi security forces and to hand over battle responsibilities to Iraqi forces as proficiency allows and conditions permit. Transfers are evaluated area by area and region by region, and are gradual to ensure an effective and successful handover of security responsibilities.

As of 6 March, 101 Iraqi army and special operations battalions are conducting counter-insurgency operations. Fifty-nine of these are in the lead. All 28 authorized Iraqi national police units are operational, with 8 in the lead. Sixty-five per cent of Baghdad is under the control of the Iraqi security forces. Overall, Iraqi security forces assuming battle responsibilities have increased to 2 divisions, 11 brigades and 49 battalions. Iraqi forces now total more than 240,000 Ministry of Defence and Ministry of the Interior troops trained and equipped for counter-insurgency operations. That includes nearly 112,900 Defence Ministry personnel, 87,000 police and 40,700 other forces from the Interior Ministry.

During this reporting period, the President of the United States, acting on recommendations from military commanders, authorized a decrease in the number of United States combat brigades deployed in Iraq from 17 to 15 — a reduction of approximately 7,000 troops. Although based on several factors, that decision reflects primarily the growing capability of Iraqi security forces. Several of our coalition partners are taking or planning similar measures, also based on assessments of current conditions, in close consultation with all partners.

Recent examples of how Iraqi Defence Ministry and Interior Ministry forces are progressing in the ability to provide security to the Iraqi people include the following. On 30 December, Iraqi police and army units successfully rescued the brother of a member of the Salah ad Din Provincial Council and arrested three suspects after a failed kidnapping attempt the day before. On 30 January, more than 20 Iraqi soldiers graduated from the advanced weapons training programme conducted by the Multinational Force in Al Hillah. The programme focused on individual and small-unit tactics as well as on improvised explosive devices, clearing buildings and land navigation. Those graduates will put their new skills to work training other Iraqi soldiers.

In early February, Iraqi and United States soldiers rescued dozens of people south-east of Mosul after powerful storms swept through northern Iraq, causing flooding along a tributary of the Tigris. Soldiers from the second Iraqi army division used small boats and braved strong currents to rescue almost 100 people stranded on a small islands in the swollen Great Zab river.

The Multinational Force — notably the Georgian, Romanian and South Korean contingents — continues to provide security for the United Nations in Baghdad, Basra and Erbil, respectively. Those troops provided static site security, reconnaissance, security patrols, convoy escorts, checkpoints and, when necessary, medevac and emergency evacuation. In addition, Fijian troops provide static and close-in protection for United Nations personnel and facilities in Baghdad.

The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), led by Special Representative Ashraf Qazi, has made essential contributions to Iraqi progress, particularly its support for the 15 December election and in Government formation. We echo UNAMI's call on the United Nations to play the fullest possible role in Iraq.

Success will be achieved when the Iraqi people can themselves secure their own safety, freedom and prosperity. Training Iraqi security forces to assume primary responsibility for security is essential. Continued progress in forming a unity Government and in fostering national reconciliation will contribute to the achievement of greater stability and security. The international community — particularly Iraq's neighbours, especially Syria and Iran — must do more to stop foreign fighters entering Iraq. Additionally, they should fulfil their international obligations under resolution 1546 (2004) to support the new Government of Iraq by ending material and financial support for individuals and groups that oppose the new, legitimate Iraqi Government.

The Multinational Force and the combined efforts of the Multinational Force and the Iraqi security forces continue to provide security for democracy to take root in Iraq. The Multinational Force remains committed to the tasks in hand and to ensuring success.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Al-Istrabadi (Iraq): Allow me at the outset, Mr. President, to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month, and to commend your predecessor, the Permanent Representative of the United States, for his tenure last month.

The past three months have been critical to Iraq's transition from dictatorship to a united, federal, pluralistic, constitutional democracy. The results of Iraq's elections were certified in the middle of last month. The elections were free, fair and transparent, and, in distinction to those of a year ago, all of Iraq's communities participated in them. Iraqis know that democracy is not a destination but a process, and an evolutionary process at that. We know that we are still at the very beginning of the process. Still, the next time a representative of Iraq sits in this Chamber to report on events unfolding there, he will do so — for the first time in five decades — as a representative of an elected Government operating under a permanent constitution.

Negotiations are now under way for the formation of a new Government. The negotiations are bound to take some more time, as the various parties explore the formation of a national unity Government. There is a sense among Iraq's political leadership that such a Government will likely help to improve the security climate in the country, as it will allow all of Iraq's various groupings — political, ethnic and confessional — to become enfranchised. My Government understands that that sense of enfranchisement is a vital necessity in further isolating those whose agenda is merely to interrupt the completion of the political transformation of the country. As a first step towards achieving the formation of the Government, it is expected that the parliament will be convened for its first session tomorrow.

With respect to security, the Iraqi police and security forces have assumed many of the functions previously performed exclusively by the multinational forces. Major checkpoints in the capital are controlled by Iraqis, and it is Iraqi forces that patrol the streets. Ministries and other Government offices are guarded and controlled by Iraqi units. Iraqi forces are also assuming an ever-increasing role in enforcement operations throughout the country. It is a matter of clear policy for us that effective Iraqi security and police forces be trained as quickly as possible so that Iraqis can assume all responsibility for Iraq's security needs, thus eventually obviating the need for the continued presence of the Multinational Force.

My Government believes that the economic development of Iraq must be an integral part of the political stabilization of the country. Iraq has too long been isolated from the world economy. To the extent that those who oppose Iraq's political development succeed in keeping Iraq so isolated, they will have accomplished a major strategic aim. We therefore call upon the world community to continue to engage in Iraq. We are grateful for the pledges made by many donor nations, but we call on them to redeem those pledges and transfer the pledged amounts.

Iraq will continue to need the active engagement of the United Nations as an Organization. To that end, we again ask for an increase in the number of staff of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) operating throughout Iraq in the three offices established for that purpose. We will need active UNAMI participation as the political process continues to unfold in the constitutional phase, as amendments are considered, and as laws enforcing constitutional provisions are drafted by the first parliament. In a very real sense, the work of reconstructing our political institutions is only now beginning, and the United Nations has much to offer us in that respect.

I must turn my attention to the ugly and cowardly turn which terrorism has taken in Iraq. Unfortunately, attacks on and around houses of worship, bearing the hallmarks of supporters of the previous regime, are not a new phenomenon, as terrorists have been employing the tactic since 2003. But while previous attacks targeted worshippers or individuals, late last month a new type of attack occurred: terrorists targeted the holy shrine in Samarra itself, a shrine holy to and honoured by all Muslims and, indeed, all Iraqis, regardless of faith. The purpose was not merely to destroy the building itself. The ultimate goal of the attack — and of attacks on other mosques throughout the country — was to foment a civil war along confessional lines, to pit Shia against Sunni. Yet Iraqis from across confessional, ethnic and political lines stand united in their horror and condemnation of such attacks, as they condemn attacks on all houses of worship. The people of Iraq overwhelmingly reject attempts by terrorists to incite sectarian conflict through such heinous tactics.

We are mindful of and grateful for the Security Council's repeated support of our people as they combat the scourge of terrorism. Not least among that

support was resolution 1618 (2005), in which the Council unreservedly condemned terrorism in Iraq. My Government believes that it is right and fitting for the Security Council to continue to condemn that barbarity without qualification or equivocation of any sort. Doing so demonstrates the unity of the civilized world and its determination to defeat the forces of terrorism, whether they are in New York, London, Beslan or Baghdad. In this respect, we are cognizant that resolution 1618 (2005) reaffirmed the duty of Member States in our region to undertake specific acts to prevent terrorism from being planned, funded or otherwise projected from their territories into Iraq. We renew the call on our neighbours to abide by those obligations.

The Secretary-General's report expends some effort reporting on the status of human rights in Iraq. Let me be clear: the Government of Iraq is committed to respect for human rights and for the rule of law, as it acknowledges that there is yet room for improvement in that area. My Government is determined to make those improvements, and it welcomes any constructive criticisms in this respect. At the same time, we note that the report does not take into account the extent to which the current security situation has contributed to the Government's inability fully to implement its human rights agenda. Moreover, the report should have made it plain that it regarded the terrorism extant in Iraq as itself constituting an unacceptable attack on fundamental human rights. The duties arising under international human rights and humanitarian law, after all, apply not only to Governments, but to all, universally.

It is appropriate to take note of those steps undertaken by the Government of Iraq to improve human rights practices in the country, notwithstanding the security situation.

First among them is the presence, for the first time in 46 years, of a vibrant and robust civil society sector with unfettered access to a variety of governmental agencies, including jails, prisons and courthouses. When allegations of abuse do arise, they are reported in the media, and, as the report itself acknowledges, they are investigated by Government authorities.

Second, there is now extensive training of police and security forces, including jailers and prison guards, in international human rights standards. The Ministry of Human Rights has been tasked with conducting such training, and it has created and publicized the existence of mechanisms for reporting and investigating alleged abuses.

Third, Iraq's new permanent constitution enshrines the principles of international human rights law, principles sacred to civilized peoples the world over. While there is still work to be done for us to reach the lofty standard to which we ourselves aspire, we have also accomplished much in the brief span of 21 months since the transfer of authority to a sovereign Government.

My Government warmly welcomes the Secretary-General's statement that it is time to normalize Iraq's relationship with the Security Council by lifting the barriers to Iraq's full reintegration into the community of nations. Those barriers and sanctions were first introduced when Iraq was governed by a rogue and lawless dictatorship that had attacked and occupied a fellow Member State. Those days are now behind us. My Government again asks the Security Council to review and rescind prior mandates imposed upon Iraq's previous regime, as they are no longer relevant.

Despite ongoing difficulties, for their genuine accomplishments, particularly on the political track, achieved under the most difficult circumstances imaginable, the Iraqi people have justly earned the admiration of freedom-loving peoples the world over. Yet I would be remiss if I reached the end of my remarks today without pausing to commend the Secretary-General and his Special Representative, Mr. Ashraf Qazi, and the entire UNAMI staff for their tireless efforts on behalf of Iraq. I must also express the gratitude of my Government and that of the people of Iraq to the Security Council, and to each of its member States, since the liberation of my homeland from tyranny for the unwavering support we have received from this body in the difficult task we have undertaken. We look forward to working closely with the United Nations, as well as our friends in the region and beyond, to continue the vital work of rebuilding our country.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I should now like to invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.50 a.m.